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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001411

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/20/2013  
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SUBJECT: WARRI CRISIS UPDATE 20AUG03

REF: ABUJA 1409 AND PREVIOUS

1.(U) Classified by Charge' d'Affaires, a.i. Rick Roberts for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

2.(C) SUMMARY: In what may be a lull before the storm, fighting in Warri town subsided August 20 as additional police and army troops appeared preparing for what many expect will soon be a large-scale military operation against the warring militants. END SUMMARY

3.(SBU) Fighting in Warri town appears to have subsided August 20. In separate conversations with CRO, FNDIC leader Dan Ekpedithe and a Warri-based worker of U.S. NGO "IFESH" reported that the situation in the port area of Warri town had calmed, with no new attacks by Itsekiri militants. The latter saw three large trucks transporting troops towards the port area; Ekpedithe saw three large "trailers" discharging over 100 soldiers in the area around 1200 local. The Ijaw militant leader claimed that the Ijaw continue a defensive posture, and would not fight unless attacked. Both sources report that residents of the port area are evacuating with whatever they can carry amidst rumors of imminent military action. No new deaths were reported overnight.

4.(SBU) Ijaw youth leader Dimieri Von Kemedi told CRO August 20 that he cancelled plans to travel to Warri after hearing of the intense fighting and rumors of the imminent military operation. He stated that he supported military action at this point; "it is needed" to stop the bloodshed.

5.(SBU) Acting Deputy Inspector General of Police for Operations Lawrence Alobi August 20 confirmed to CRO that nine 100-men units of Mobile Police (MOPOL) have been transferred from various parts of the country for deployment in Warri town to augment the Joint Task Force. The 900 MOPOL are arriving now and will be under the joint command of the Assistant Inspector General of Police for Zone 5 (covering Delta State) Gazali Lawal and Army BGen Zamani. Alobi refuted an August 20 press report that 20 policemen have died in the Warri fighting; only one police officer has been killed he asserted.

6.(C) ChevronTexaco (CTX) offices in Warri remain open; Shell's remains closed. CTX's Security Advisor Hamish MacDonald believes military action is imminent and he is attempting to coordinate a joint position on the military's action with counterparts in Shell, but Shell has remained "tight-lipped" on its dealings with the Nigerian military, he disclosed.

7.(SBU) In an August 20 phone conversation with CRO, Chief (Mrs.) Mercy Almonsa-Isei, chairperson of the House Committee on Petroleum and Gas confirmed that the House Speaker, Aminu Masari, in the coming days would be leading a House delegation (including Almonsa-Isei) to inspect the Warri areas affected by the recent violence and to encourage peace negotiations among the warring parties.

8.(SBU) Governor James Ibori is back in Warri and as of 1630 local was chairing an emergency meeting with ethnic leaders and security forces chiefs, according to his personal assistant.

YORUBAS AIDING THE ITSEKIRI?

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9.(C) He disclosed that other Ijaw leaders have been talking to the militant Yoruba "Odua Peoples Congress (OPC)" about the OPC's alleged support for the Itsekiri militants. (Note: Itsekiris are ethnically affiliated with the Yoruba. End Note) According to Von Kemedi, an OPC leader told the Ijaw in recent days that the OPC is not officially supporting the Itsekiri militants, but he allowed for the possibility that some OPC cadre are fighting alongside their Itsekiri

brethren. Von Kemedi hopes to meet with OPC leaders in Lagos this weekend to solicit their help in obtaining a cessation of Itsekiri attacks.

10.(C) CORRECTION: Yesterday's update (reftel) incorrectly cited the Director of Operations in Warri as the DATT's source of the confirmation of the four soldiers' death and the plans for an attack "soon" (vice over the August 22-24 weekend). The source was Minister of Defense Kwankwaso. The correct spelling of the Director of Operations is: Pkwember (pronounced "Kwambay").

11.(C) COMMENT: Public attention to the Warri crisis has reached a new height, with the Presidency and National Assembly leaders joining the public chorus for immediate federal government action to save lives. The military seems to have its green light.

ROBERTS